

David of Sassoun
Critical Studies on the Armenian Epic

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VERSIFICATION IN THE ARMENIAN EPIC

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Dr. Paul Wittek, brilliant observer of the Ottomans and a lot more besides (*Et rerum causas, et quid natura, docebat*), used to tell a story. A researcher, graduate in several African languages, visited a *griot* and asked him to recite a heroic poem so that he might make a transcription for the Collège de France. "There was once a Chief, a mighty Warrior, Father of his People," began the *griot*. The scholar wrote this down in his notebook, and read it back to the *griot* to check: "There was once a chief, a mighty warrior, father of his people." "No, no," said the *griot*. "Listen. There was once a Chief, a mighty Warrior, Father of his People." My transcription is not accurate enough, thought the scholar, and writing the verse down with a few more diacritical and suprasegmental signs, he read it back again to the *griot*: "There was once a chief, a mighty warrior, father of his people." "No, no," said the *griot*. "Listen. There was once a Chief, a mighty Warrior, Father of his People." The scholar was proud of his phonetic ear. "Mais nom d'une pipe!", he exclaimed, "that is what I said!" "No," said the *griot*, "What you said is Wumumbu. What I said is Kana." I beg Uncle Paul's pardon if I have not remembered the African words correctly: it is a long time since I drank coffee in the School of Oriental and African Studies, where I could check up, and Uncle Paul has been dead too many a year. But the gist is there, and one begins to feel a special sympathy for the French researcher when attempting to deal with the Armenian epic on a typing-stool in an Oxford study far removed, socially, spatially, and temporally, from the performers themselves.

Of course, one has at one's disposal much of the voluminous transcriptions contained in the four volumes published under the title

*Sasna tsrer*¹ by Manouk Abeghyan and others at Erevan in 1936, 1944, 1951, and (edited by S. Harout'younyan and A. Sahakyan) in 1979. These fundamental tomes comprise the fieldwork of many researchers, the version recorded by Garegin Srvandztiants' in 1873 (reprinted in tome II, part 2) being the first. The texts, as there edited, are, except when the informant's account is clearly in the form of a folktale, printed in short lines in verse. True there are some passages, some snatches, in rhyme:

*Erkou aghber hetsan,
Ou khest erets'in Arzroma nestoghin ou ekan* (t. II, p. 10)

"The two brothers mounted their horse,
Burned with fury against him who sat at Erzerum,
and arrived there."

¹ This would seem to be an unfortunate choice as a general title for what many reciters call *Sasna toun* (House of Sassoun), *Sassouna t'agavorner* (Kings of Sassoun), *Sassouna Davit'* (David of Sassoun), etc. *Sasna tsrer* has been painfully accurately interpreted *inter alia* by one translator (Leon Surmelian, *Daredevils of Sassoun* [London, 1964] p. 18) as (unpredictable) "screwballs of Sassoun." *Tsour* means basically 'crooked, twisted,' a concept which in other cultures has been extended to mean 'thief' (American English *crook*) or 'ill' (Australian English *crook*). Malkhasyants' gives a figurative meaning *khent'* (mad), quoting *Sasna tsrer* as an example. The grotesque behavior of many Ossetic Nart heroes, and to a large extent that of Homer's gods, whose *asbestos gelos* 'uncontrolled laughter' often rebounds on themselves, are good illustrations of S. Salakaya's theory (*apud* A. Petrosian, ed.), *Skazaniya o Nartax* (Moscow, 1969), p. 408, that 'such parodies arise only when the epic begins to decline: the subjects of the epic are then deformed, and can pass into comic genres, most often into folktales.' This may well explain the attitude of those reciters who look upon the Armenian heroes as *tsour*. A slight improvement in the heroes' status might be achieved if the word could be interpreted as 'cunning, sly'—after all, they usually get the better of their infidel enemies. The converse of a reasonable semantic development (meanings can "move" in all directions) "crooked-sly" can be observed in the Turkish loan from Armenian *charpik* 'crooked' (as in *charpik bajakli* 'with crooked legs', Steurwald) from Arm. *charpik* 'cunning, shrewd, resourceful' (Malkhasyants'), originally from Iranian (NP *jarb* 'fat, greasy', *jarbi* 'fat, softness, rectitude, bravery, facility, ease, success, prosperity,' Steingass.)

But the lines are very irregular, and could easily be read as prose—if one did not remember the *griot's* warning. For the written word can be very deceptive. Unfortunately, not everyone is as privileged as the French researcher in the story to be able to study the epic from the reciter's very lips.

1873, when Srvandztiants' took down the above couplet from Krpo of Taron, was too early a date for the phonograph, which was not invented by Edison until 1878. But in 1932, when Karapet Melik'-Ohanjanyan took down the version of Karapet T'amoyan of Alashkert (t. II, pp. 359-404), and in 1946, when Vard Bdoyan took down that of Mkrtich' Petrosyan of Saralanj, (II.1, pp. 645-703), it was possible to record them on tape, although I do not know whether this was in fact done. Between the years 1933 and 1935, Milman Parry, on the second occasion accompanied by his pupil Albert B. Lord, made two visits to Yugoslavia to study a living tradition of epic poetry which he knew would be of relevance to his main interest, the Homeric epics, the results of which were the Milman Parry Collection of records and transcriptions of Serbo-Croat heroic poetry in the Widener Library in Harvard University, part of which was published as *Songs from Novi Pazar* edited by A. B. Lord with some musical transcriptions by Béla Bartók, and a volume of notes arranged by Parry in book form as *Cor Huso: A Study in Serbocroatian Poetry*. This ideal scientific investigation can make those interested in the Armenian epic green with envy. It was the political situation in the Soviet Union that thwarted any plans on Milman Parry's part to study the Russian *byliny*. The Stalin era was not conducive to foreigners traveling around remote parts of Russia armed with those dangerous instruments of espionage, the typewriter and the tape recorder, and one fears that the material Parry might have collected in Russia has disappeared, with its reciters forever.

One has the same fears for the Armenian epic. One can only hope that somewhere among the Institutes of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR that there are some live transcriptions of what the peasant reciters of the *David of Sassoun* cycle actually sang, chanted, or said. There are some transcriptions of tunes connected with the *Oghormi* (Lord have mercy) introductions, the *Ap'sosank'* (Laments), the *Mesramelik'i erge* (Song of Msra Melik'), made variously by Komitas, Sp. Melik'yan, V. Samvelyan, and A.

K'och'aryan, specimens of which are reproduced by Manouk Abeghyan in his t. II, part 1, facing pp. 208 and 209. Such transcriptions call for great skill, and one trusts that they are as accurate as those made by Béla Bartók of Serbo-Croatian and Turkish melodies. The transcriptions by Samvelyan and K'och'aryan seem particularly detailed and conscientious. One's reservations stemming from the fact that all can be played on the (tempered) piano and know no quarter-tones, even as accidentals, are hopefully merely *a priori*.

From the written descriptions to hand, it is difficult to form a complete and detailed picture of the actual performance of the Armenian epic. How much did a reciter perform at one sitting, for example? Among the Muslims of Yugoslavia, during Ramadan, for a month the men fast from sunrise to sunset and gather in coffee-houses all night long to talk and listen to epic. Here is a perfect circumstance for the singing of one song during the entire night. Here also is an encouragement of the semi-professional singer to attain a repertory of at least thirty songs.²

Did any of the Armenian folk-singers perform to the accompaniment of a musical instrument, as do the Yugoslavs? Lord's description of the blind Stjepan Majstorović (pp. 18-19) is, as he says, worth relating: "When he was twenty he had learned to sing to the *gusle* (the one-stringed bowed instrument used to accompany the singing) which he kept always with him in a bag, to prevent pranksters from putting soap on the string and thus spoiling it so that he would have to get a new string for it."

Ashoughs, who were instrumentalists as well as singers, figure in the Armenian epic. Khandout' sends two of them to sing her praises to Davit', and Davit''s uncle, Tsenov Hovan, suspecting a trick, first breaks their *sazs*.³ But we have no picture of an epic reciter accompanied by a musical instrument. There is some indication that some singers may have used mechanical aids to emphasize the spoken word. B. Khalat'eants',⁴ has a photographic frontispiece showing Zatik Khapoyents' holding a pointed spade with a six-foot

² A. B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), 4th printing, p. 15.

³ Abeghyan, II. 1, pp. 284-286.

⁴ *Hay zhoghovrdakan diwts'aznakan vepe* (Vienna, 1903).

stave, which may simply have been one of the tools of his everyday trade as a farm laborer. But one is reminded of the Greek rhapsode's staff, which he used to emphasize his recital, as depicted on an Attic red-figure amphora dated ca. 409 B.C. now in the British museum⁵ and the Muslim *maddâh* (panegyrist, story-teller) (whose derivation from Ar. *madaha* [to praise] is of significance in this context of heroes) sometimes uses a long wand (as may be seen in action in a Marrakesh scene in the 1956 Hitchcock film, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*). One is forced to wonder, therefore, if the Armenian singer of tales used his spade to achieve similar effects. Recitals were certainly accompanied by expressive gesture. Vard Bdoyan, describing the style of Mkrtich' Petrosyan (Mko Bidza "Uncle Mko"), aged 91 in 1946 when his version was transcribed (his portrait, Abeghyan, II.1, facing p. 648 shows him supporting himself with a crutch-occasionally used to underline a point?—and shaking his fist with menace in his eyes), says (*ibid.*, p. 644) "his voice is clear and vigorous. When reciting, as also when explaining, he likes to have recourse to rhythmical movements of the arms, and where he considers it essential, he characterizes the heroes of the epic by means of remarkable vocal modulations (*elevejnerov*, lit. "risings and fallings")." Others apparently relied on the voice alone. Abeghyan's portrait of Arak'el Shakoyan (II.1, facing p. 96), shows a calm, elegantly *kaldpak'ed* and *kaftan'ed* greybeard surrounded by four children, but Ervand Lalayan, who transcribed his version in 1903, depicts his style to be less cosy: "He begins in a soft tone, but gradually raising his voice, he ends up shouting. His voice carries far, especially when he is describing the battles of his heroes" (p. 91). It is noteworthy that Mko was a singer of songs: "he is a story-teller, a teller of fables, a composer (*horinogh*) and singer (*erkich'*). He sings troubador (*gousanakan*), popular, and self-composed songs. His voice is highly melodious. He sings, in a tenor voice, in Armenian, Azeri, and occasionally in Kurdish. He composes also in both Armenian and Azeri. In our circles (*mer kargeroum*) the content of the songs composed by him comprises eulogies of the leaders of the country, kolkhoz cadres, the way of life (*kents'aghe*), etc. With this repertoire of songs Mko Bidza has appeared at Aparan regional

⁵ See G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge: University Press, 1962), repr. 1977.

and All-Armenian Republican Olympiads, where he has won second prizes. One can only hope that some of Mko's performances, especially of the epic, have been recorded at these functions, and preserved for future study."

In the case of the only version I personally heard, and that from a tape-recording, viz. the performance of Sanam Stenian in Los Angeles, a transcription of which is in the present volume, one is struck by the vigorous and expressive delivery, and by the way in which the reciter's native Vaspourakan village dialect, with its long vowels and even syllabic rhythm, far different from the clipped metropolitan pronunciation of Constantinople, suits the text.

It will be seen from the above that some scholars did make an attempt to describe the circumstances of their transcriptions. But just how far this fell short of the ideal may be seen from a comparison with the methods of Parry and Lord. That there might be a discrepancy between what the artist recited and of what the transcriber wrote down (Wittek's Wumumbu and Kana) is never broached by Armenian researchers. Lord (p. 71) refers to a well known song in the Yugoslav Marko Kraljevic cycle of which the Parry Collection contains four versions all taken down from one singer in 1933 and 1934, two in writing, two recorded on the phonograph; in addition, two recordings were made of the first twenty or so lines of the song. All varied, exactly how is shown by Lord in his Appendix II (pp. 236-241).

That, as Punch says, is the way to do it. That is the kind of material one should be working on in the Armenian field, but which the writer of the present paper regrets that he has not got at his disposal. Something, however, one hopes, may still be done from an Oxford study.

It is not only the mention of "Olympiads" by Bdoyan that prompts a comparison of the Armenian epic with those of Homer. It has become common literary critical practice to divide epics into "literary" and "folk" or some such dichotomy, but the *genre*, the recital of heroic tales, is one, whether the heroes be Achilles, Satan, or Gold Khan. In conception and intent epics are much the same, though few, like Milton's, have the Devil as hero, or, like Homer's, portray the antagonist as equal in honor and valor, "divine," and in no way inferior to the gods except in supernatural powers. It is in the form of the Armenian epic with which this paper is concerned.

As in other respects, Homer's epics stand head and shoulder above all others by virtue of their exquisite form. The *Iliad* tells the whole story of the Trojan War in the course of the recital of one episode, the combat between Achilles and Hector: we learn how the war began and how it will end, how Achilles will be slain and Aeneas survive, within a central pulsating narrative nucleus as full of concentrated and potential energy as the muscle of the butterfly's wing. But it is the versatile perfection of the basic verse, composed of six feet of variously arranged dactyls and spondees in an intricate permutation of different rhythms, that is the real miracle of poetic creation, enhancing images already perfect in themselves:

Greek

Eaos/ de kroko-/ peplos e-/ kidnato/ pasan ep/ aîan

(*Iliad*, xxiv. 695)

"Dawn the saffron-veiled, spread over all the earths"

Antoine Meillet, who time and again suddenly rises to confront the Armenologist in practically every branch of endeavor—and his views on Homer are not irrelevant to the Armenian epic—and who actually introduced Parry to his first Yugoslav mentor, Mathias Murko, held that "Homeric epic is entirely composed of formulae handed down from poet to poet.... Even lines, parts of which are not found in any other passage, have the character of formulae, and it is doubtless pure chance that they are not attested elsewhere."⁶

It would probably be fairer to say that the inherited formulae formed a framework upon which the subtle, imaginative, individual poet that was Homer could weave his inspired improvisations, *pace* Meillet, who, genius though he was on the technical and sociological side of language, is not foremost in the field of aesthetics. But there is no denying that Parry is right when he underlines the prime importance of the influence of the dactylic hexameter on the diction of the Greek epic, and that "formularly diction... was created by the desire of the bards to have ready to hand words and expressions which easily could be put into heroic verse. The epic poets fashioned

⁶ *Les origines indo-européennes des mètres grecs* (Paris, 1923), p. 61, cit. *The Making of Homeric Verse, the Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. A. Parry (Oxford, 1971), p. 9.

and preserved in the course of generations a complex technique of formulae, a technique designed in its smallest details for the twofold purpose of expressing ideas appropriate to epic in a suitable manner, and of attenuating the difficulties of versification (p. 9)."

Homer had his predecessors. But when, ca. 750 B.C., he arose among the bards of Ancient Greece like a new Mozart, it was his versions that drove out all others, and which were ordered to be written down by the tyrant of Athens, Peisistratus, in the sixth century B.C., to rescue them from the confusion resulting from purely oral tradition. Falling again into confusion owing to various "improvements" to the text by professional Homeric rhapsodes, some of whom treated their material with less than the respect it deserved, and various interpolations by inferior poets and critics, it was again rescued by Aristarchus of Samothrace, head of the Library of Alexandria, in the middle of the second century B.C., who in accordance with the new scholarly traditions of the Library, established a vulgate text that is for all intents and purposes the one recognized today. Assuming, with many,⁷ that the siege and sack of Troy by the Mycenae under Agamemnon referred to in the epics took place around 1240 to 1230 B.C. (as archeological evidence dates the destruction of Troy VIIa), and that Greek epic songs celebrating this event arose soon after (bards are not slow in this respect: the Yugoslav Majstorovic had composed a new song by the 30s on King [Woodrow] Wilson, Lord, p. 19, and Mko Bidza, as mentioned above was topical as well as traditional), then it took 500 years for them to reach Homer's perfection, a further 200 to establish his versions as canonical, and a further 400 to fix the definitive text, 1,100 years in all. This is not irrelevant to the study of the Armenian epic, which some scholars judge likewise a thousand years old.⁸

It would be a difficult, if not an impossible task, in spite of the mass of material assembled by Manouk Abeghyan, to construct a stemma displaying the genesis and development of any particular episode in the Armenian epic, or to reconstruct a primary or

⁷ E.g., G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer*, p. 17.

⁸ Cf. the decree, reported in *Khorhrtayin Hayastan* of 8th September 1938, of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Armenian S.S.R., officially establishing 1939 as the 1,000th Jubilee Year of the epic *David of Sassoun*, reproduced in facsimile *apud* Abeghyan, *op. cit.*, II. 1, following p. 703.

primitive form. That this can nowhere be done in the field of popular epics must perhaps suffice as consolation. The form of the Greek epic prior to Homer, and what Peisistratus actually did to the texts of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in tidying them up for recitation in the Panathenaea, is similarly obscure. Some of the Armenian bards would have been very conservative, intent upon not changing one jot or tittle of their original. An interesting example of this attitude was found by the Hungarian researcher Veronika Görög in the course of her study of the Gypsy folktale teller Janos Berki, "who thought each tale had only one version, namely the one he knew, before we met, and any difference was a mistake or inaccuracy."⁹

Other bards, more adventurous, would seek to improve upon their inherited material, and stamp it with their own individuality, an example of this being afforded by the Armenian folktales as related by Hakob Hakoyan. The great diversity of the various episodes in the Armenian epic cycle show that by the nineteenth century the tradition, from whatsoever original, if there ever was anything remotely related to the relative "unity" of say, the *Iliad*, had, either through lapse of memory or conscious innovation, been largely lost. The main characters, Sanasar, David, the two Mhers, etc., remain. Modern Soviet scholars have followed the path of Peisistratus and have put together a would-be unified version (*hamahavak' hyusvatso tek'st*) of the various branches,¹⁰ but the versions taken down from the individual bards are fascinatingly chaotic: fascinating, because, like the Serbo-Croat material collected by Milman Parry, they show popular epic in the raw.

The form of the Armenian epic apparently offends two principles widely accepted as canonical. Let us cite Professor Kirk on the Greek epic: "This heroic poetry is nearly always sung in lines with a uniform metrical pattern, a rapid and flowing rhythm like that of the Homeric hexameter or the looser decasyllable of Serbo-Croat verse. Metrical regularity is essential for learning and composing long oral poems.... Two common features of nearly all kinds of oral poems, however, are that they were composed and remembered without the aid of writing, and that they were sung or chanted, usually to a

⁹ Berki János mesél, *Hungarian Gypsy Studies* 3 (Budapest, 1985), p. 26.

¹⁰ M. Abeghyan, G. Abov, A. Ghanalanyan, ed. S. Sargsyan, *Sasounts'i Davit'* (Erevan, 1939, 2nd ed., 1961).

musical accompaniment. Poems are songs, and the Homeric word for poet is (*aoiodos*) or singer, one who accompanies himself on the lyre-like instrument known in Homer as the *kitharis* or *phorminx* (*op. cit.*, p. 56).” Is it so that the Armenian epic falls within the escape clauses *nearly always* and *usually*?

On meter, let us go back to first principles. It is no fortuity that the basic element of verse is called a foot, since metrical rhythm stems originally from the dance or the march: “The term ‘*arsis* (raising) and *thesis* (placing), as they were used by nearly all the Greek writers on Rhythm, referred to the *raising* and *putting down* of the foot in marching, dancing, or beating time.”¹¹ This is clearly shown in the Greek names for the various feet: *trochaïos* (*pous*) “trochee,” from *trecho* “run,” thus “the running foot,” “foot consisting of a long and short syllable, also called *choreios/choros* ‘dance’ ... used in a quick time... a brisk march” (Liddell and Scott 7th ed.); *iambos* ‘iamb, consisting of a short and a long syllable,’ from *iapto* “send, drive on,” as in *iaptein orchemata* “begin the dance” (though understood by Liddell and Scott, *ibid.*, “as being the foot or meter first used by satiric writers,” thinking perhaps of Eng. “to send up” in the sense of “lampoon,” the “driving” sense is more probably primary); *anapaistos* “anapaest,” from *ana-paio* “strike back, strike again” is explained by ancient grammarians (cit. Liddell and Scott) as a “dactyl reversed, *dactylus reperiussus*, *antidactylus*” though the cognate *anapaistris* “a smith’s hammer” suggest that it was named in its own right as a hammering rhythm; *sponde* from *sondo*, so called because this was the meter proper to the slow solemn melodies used at *spondai*’ (Liddell and Scott, *ibid.*). The *daktylus* “dactyl,” the Greek epic foot *par excellence* is not explained in its metrical sense by Liddell and Scott. Such a long foot cannot derive its name from the meaning “the shortest Greek measure of length, a finger’s breadth, about 7/10 of an inch,” nor from the three joints of the finger, since these are roughly equal in length and cannot represent the long-short-short syllables of the dactyl. *Dactyl* goes back, I think, to the very origins of meter, when the syllables of the feet were counted on the fingers: cf. *rhythmòs katà dáktylou* “rhythm according to the finger,” Aristotle, Nu. 631; *epi daktylon symbálllesthai* ‘reckon on the fingers,’ Herodotus, 6, 63. With this

¹¹ Goodwin, *op. cit.*, para 1621, n. 1.

one may compare the Turkic system of *parmak hisabi* “finger count” or “finger versification” whereby “the verses were based not on quantity but on the number and beat of the syllables.”¹² (With respect to this concrete and informative nomenclature, cf. the Arabic musicological use of *asâbih* “fingers,” meaning the position of the fingers on the neck of the lute, for what we obfuscatingly call a “mode,” the Latin original of which is already polysemous enough). In Greek, however, the dactyl is not meter in general, but one foot in particular, and though special terms may derive from the general, it is permissible to speculate on why the dactyl specifically means a foot consisting of one long followed by two short syllables. The feet of the Greek epic verse are in four time, and could easily be counted out on the four fingers of the upturned hand by the opposite thumb: the long syllable of the dactyl would be counted by the thumb passing over the index and middle finger together, and the following two short syllables by a touch on the ring and the little finger respectively. The spondee, by passing the thumb over the index and middle finger together, and then over the ring and little finger together. There is no need, in counting out meter, to bang on a drum or stamp one’s foot.

These “classical” feet have little relevance to Armenian meter. In his introduction to t. I of *Sasna tsrer* (pp. 5-6), Manouk Abeghyan, referring to the irregular syllable count of the verses of the Armenian epic, says that the number of syllables is irrelevant, the meter being composed of tonic stresses (*dzayneri yelevej*, “arsis and thesis”) and feet (*votk’er*, *stopa*, *pes*), three to six feet per verse. “Every foot is composed of two or three syllables and the stress is usually on the final syllable, so that the complete verse is formed in tonic meter (*sheshtakan ch’ap’*, *toniceskij razmer*) and comprised of a blend of iambs (*metsaverj*) and anapaests (*verjatanj*), with long and short verses. Abeghyan succeeds in finding four lines in which this analysis works:

Ch’e dou/ le hakhouts’/ im barév/ arár

T’kh es/ le hakhóú/ k’ez barév tám.

¹² C. Meredith-Owens, “Arud,” *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Brill, 1936); re “folk barmak,” among the Turkmen, V. M. Beliaev, *Central Asian Music*, ed. M. Slobin (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1975, orig. 1962), p. 143.

Vor doú/ hakhouts' / im barév/ ch'arnér

T'elner kol/ enknér/ im sirt/ dzi spanér.

In this way these four verses, composed of 10, 9, 9, 10 syllables, appear each to comprise four feet, iambs, and anapaest, except the final foot of verse two, which one might consider (legitimately) cataleptic. But such regularity is so rare as to constitute the exception that proves the rule. His first example from one of the “songs” (*yergerits'*) is as follows:

Ov k'enir/ ek' hart'oun/ kats'ék'

Ov hart'oun/ ek' elek' / kaynets'ék'

Ov kaynir/ ek' elék' / kapets'er

Ov tsi/ chaker/ kapir/ ék', tsi/ dziánk' / t'amk'ets'ér

Ov tsi/ tsiank' / t'amk'ir/ ek', elék/ khtsts'ék'

Ch'asék' / Davit' gögh/ ekav, gögh/ genáts'.

The verses comprise 8, 9, 10, 13 12, 10 syllables respectively, distributed by Abeghyan over 3, 4, 3, 4, 6, 5, 4, feet respectively. But the foot count is almost as irregular as the syllable count, and verse four, notionally composed of five iambs and an anapaest, would, *mutatis mutandis*, have been thrown out by Homer's ancient critics Aristarchus, Zenodotus, etc. Meter basically means something that can be regularly measured, and an imagined sextet composed of verses varying between 3, 4, 5, and 6 “feet” is not metrical.

If one can speak of versification in the Armenian epic, it must follow other canons. Which then?

The extant versions of the Armenian epic comprise various styles. In some cases the main story is told in prose, in the style of a folktale, and almost fully rhymed verses are interspersed, as in many Turkish popular epics. Thus, in the cycle recited by the 85 year old Hakob Nrgayan, the prose narrative contains poems of a dozen lines or so, of an irregular syllable count, but in the traditional Armenian monorhyme:

Parave, vor tesav Kouzbakhtoun, yerb nizake matraki
tegh ke tsarayer, dzayn tvav:
"Kouzbakhti Hazara-Sult'an
Inch' es bats'e beran,
K'ants anhaght' gazan,
K'ants shoun vazan"

"Hay, Parav anirav,
Es Kouzbakhtin ei Hazara-Sult'an,
Gnats'i Sasoun, berem shat t'an, shat ch'ort'an,
Jeghal yezner berem lecan,
Karmir kover berem ket'an,
Koys aghjikner hanem zozan,
Sarkavak'ner hetev ch'oban..."

"The old woman, when she saw Kouzbakhti using his
 spear in place of his whip, gave voice:
 Kouzbakhti, Hazara-Sultan,
 Why have you opened your jaws,
 Like an untamed wild animal,
 Like a dog on the loose?"

"Ai, Old Woman, infidel,
 I was Kuzbakhti, Hazara-Sultan.
 I went to Sassoun to carry off much *tan*, much dried curds.
 To carry off fat oxen in yokes,
 To carry off red milch cows,
 To bring back comely maidens,
 Deacons and shepherds..."

The syllable count of the poem is irregular, the first four lines being composed of 8, 6, 5, 4 syllables respectively.

A fairly regular form of verse can be found in the recitations of Mourad Hovsep'yan, collected by Sargis Haykouni (*apud* Abeghyan, II. 1, p. 236):

Ghoumrik t'agavor khach' apasht er.
Ed t'agavori mi aghjik kar.
Ed aghjik shat siroun, tesakov er.
Shat ou shat patveli, hargeli er.
Me Kerapasht t'agavor kar.

*Ed t'agavor shat zoregh er.
 Ekav, Ghoumrik t'agavorin asets',
 "Aghkjiked tour indz, ke tas, tour.
 Vor ts'i tvir, k'aghak'ed tak ou virev k'anem!"*

Ghoumrik was a king who worshipped the Cross.
 That king had one daughter.
 That daughter was very pretty, fair to behold.
 Very, very praiseworthy, very precious.
 There was an Idol-worshipping king.
 That king was very powerful.
 He came, said to King Ghoumrik,
 "Give your daughter to me, if you will give her,
 (then) give her.
 If you don't give her, I shall turn your city upside down!"

These verses are composed of 9, 9, 10, 10, 8, 8, 10, 8, 12, syllables respectively. A few verses later, however, this rough meter becomes decidedly more ragged:

*Here berets', me terter tvets' aghjkan.
 T'e, "K'et'as im aghjka khet.
 Amenayn zham aghot'k' k'anes.
 T'e, im aghjike amenayn zham aghot'k' k'ani."
 Aghjike kants'ets', "Tertter,
 Dou mer hogekan hayrn es.
 Lav ch'i yes es bare khosam," asets',
 "Amot'a ama abne petk' a sharounakov elli.
 Dou k'ou murused kendi,
 Begherd el kendi, glokhed lats'i k'ets'i,
 Hents' imana, t'e dou oghoul-oushagh es.
 Amenayn zham entegh zham-aghos'k' k'anes.
 Kerapasht t'agavor ch' imana, dou teghamard es."*

Her father brought and gave a priest to his daughter.
 (Saying), "You will go with my daughter.
 At every (canonical) hour you will say prayers.
 My daughter will say her prayers at every hour."
 His daughter called (the priest). "Priest,
 You are our spiritual father.
 It would be better I should not say this," she said.
 "It is shameful.
 But this thing must be carried through.

Shave off your beard.
 Shave off your mustache too, and place a
 scarf on your head,
 So that one might imagine you to be a young man-servant.
 The idolatrous king will not understand: (for him)
 you will be (merely) a young man."

These verses are composed of 10, 7, 8, 13, 7, 7, 13, 12, 7, 11, 11, 11, 14, syllables respectively. If one thought in terms of stresses, the first line would have naturally five, the second three or four, the third four, the fourth five or six, the fifth three. One could be excused for suspecting that this is not poetry, but prose.

The reciter of the episodes in the Armenian epic does not seem to be helped overmuch by any meter, such as helps any modern actor to remember long passages in, say, Shakespeare's plays, which the playwright has considerably usually written in blank verse. It is, of course, possible for a reciter to commit to memory long passages of prose. The Islamic *hâfiz* commits the whole of the Qur'an to memory (though he is to some extent helped by *saj* or rhymed prose), and his ilk is not rare. In a largely non-literate society, which does not depend upon the written word, memories are better developed. The good memories of the Armenian bards are frequently emphasized by their more book-learned researchers. Khach'atour Mnats'akanian tells how Hakob Nrgéyan's "sharp memory" (*sour hishoghout'youm*) was quickly noticed by his schoolteacher (Abeghyan, II, 1, p. 9). Ervand Lalayan speaks of the illiterate Arak'el Shakoyan as the "possessor of a lively memory" (*var hishoghout'yan ter*, *ibid.*, p. 91), and one could easily multiply such references. The reciters investigated in the nineteenth century had learned their versions from parents or grandparents or other relations, or from other noted performers in their village, and it is not possible to determine just how true their memories were, or to what extent they modified and improved. Lord (p. 43) has pointed out that for the formation of an original style, "while both remembering and creating (in the sense of making, not necessarily 'originating') play important roles, the latter, creating, is especially significant.... I believe that we are justified in considering that the creating of phrases is the true art of the singer on the level of line formation, and it is this facility rather than his memory of relatively fixed formulas that marks him as a skillful singer in performance." We have seen above how the version of one

Serbo-Croat singer varies from one performance to another. In saying of his informant Zatik Khapoyents', whose version he took down in 1898, that he "related it three times almost word for word, without any changes," Khalat'eants' (*op. cit.*, p. vii) pays tribute to his memory, but hardly to his versatility.

The lines into which the Armenian epic recitals are divided are thus usually irregular. Even when a song of the normally metrically conscious *ashoughs* is reproduced in the overall rhythmic version of Mourad Hovsep'yan, who according to his transcriber Sargis Haykouni (cit. Abeghyan II. 1, p. 233) earned his living as an *ashough* himself, telling folktales and singing songs (*hek'iat'ner ev erger aselov*), it is syllabically irregular, as in the eulogy to David's future bride, the Princess Khandout', the exaggerations of which she is represented as over sixty feet in height—incidentally recall those of the Ossetic Nart epics concerning Satana, Gunda, etc. One may note also that the heroes of the *Iliad*, Achilles, Ajax, and Hector, are all called, "monstrous, huge" (translated from the Greek).

Endra boyen asenk'
Karasoun gāz a, me ch'ap' eveli.
Endra chakati lenk'e govank'.
Irek'gāz a, me ch'ap' eveli.
Endra serti lenk'e govank'.
Okhte gāz, me ch'ap' eveli.
Endra karmrout'oun asenk'
K'ants' neran ginin karmir a.
Endra siptekout'oun asenk'.
K'ants' mek orva galats' dzoun siptak a.
Endra kakgout'oun asenk'.
K'ants' banbaki k'oulen kakough a.
En arzhān ch'i mez nman achouch-pachouchin.
En arzhān a k'ez nman t'agavorin.
 (II.1, pp. 285-286)

Let us tell of her build:
 She is forty *gaz* (sixty feet) tall,
 plus a measure.
 Let us praise the width of her forehead:
 It is three *gaz* (four feet six inches) wide,
 plus a measure.

Let us praise the breadth of her heart:
 It is seven *gaz* (ten foot, three and a half inches), plus a measure.
 Let us tell of her rosiness:
 It is redder than pomegranate wine.
 Let us tell of her whiteness:
 She is whiter than the snow that falls
 in one day.
 Let us tell of her softness:
 She is softer than a ball of cotton.
 She is not one for dwarfs like us.
 She is worthy of a king like you.

Thus the form of the Armenian epic as we possess it nowhere approaches the perfection of Homer. But nothing does, except perhaps for the *Aeneid* of Virgil. The subtle quantitative meter of the Greek classical hexameter in which 'the Greeks distinguished and reconciled the stress of voice which constituted the /quantitative/ ictus and the raising of the tone which constitutes the word accent /musical tone, acute, grave, acute-grave/' (W. W. Goodwin, *A Greek Grammar*, 2nd ed. 1894, repr. 1983, para 1625) became obsolete at the beginning of our era with the loss of vowel quantity and the development of a stress accent, as in German, and Armenian, to be replaced by an epic line composed of fifteen syllables. So, in the medieval Greek epic cycle *Digenes Akritas*, with which story of the struggle of the Greeks of Asia Minor against the Seljuks the Armenian stories of wars against the Muslims have much in common, so much so that a direct literary link has been posited.¹³ With the following exploit of *Digenes* one can compare that of Great Mher, called Lion Mher, though both may be common folk hyperbole, to which the similar exploits of Samson and Hercules belong (in the Georgian epic, *The Man in the Panther Skin*,¹⁴ the

¹³ Cf. the articles by N. Adontz and A. A. M. Bryer cited in Kouymjian, "History and Enigma," *supra* p. 7, n. 13.

¹⁴ The Georgian epic by Shota Rustaveli (ca. 1172-1216), with its theme of knights errant wasting away for love of fair ladies, and its consummate form (monorhyming quatrains of verses of 8+8 syllables), is too sophisticated to bear close comparison with *David of Sassoun*, which represents the raw state of epic prior to being transmuted by a single poet of genius into a finished whole. For Rustaveli, like Firdawsi with his *Shahnameh*, which continued the work of Daqiqi, already based on older material, had his less

hero Taniel says that, probably at the age of five, killing a lion was no more difficult for him than killing a sparrow', st. 310/320):

Greek

*Tak`y pedo tes klines mou, lambáno too rhabdin mou,
kraton ten rhàbdon en khersin, étrkhon pròs ekeinon,
kai synantesas te auton, kai mian epikrousas,
tò deerma heûron hygies, kokkala syntrimmena.*

Quickly I rise from my bed, grasp my staff,
And holding the staff firmly in my hand, run towards it,
And confronting it (the lion) and giving it a mighty blow,
I acquire its skin entire, the flesh inside squashed to bits.

(para. 389, II. 2934-7, ed. P. Kalonaros, t. 1 [Athens, 1970], p. 163)

The Serbo-Croat epic tales, which favor a verse of ten syllables, are just as regular:

polished predecessors, such as the *mgosani* (Arm. *gusan* from Iranian) 'minstrel' and the *mak'ebi katsi* "eulogy man," 'panegyrist', the singer of *k'ebas* "praises," a role still played by Sayat'-Nova in eighteenth century Georgia. Indeed, in his epilogue, Rustaveli states that in singing 'these exotic tales of exotic monarchs,' 'I have found and turned into verse ancient customs and deeds, praises (*k'eba*) of these kings,' mentioning by name three fellow composers of eulogies similar to his (Tiflis ed., 1953, stt. 1667, 1669, tr. M. Wardrop, stt. 1574, 1576). On whether the folk ballads concerning Rustaveli's heroes, reputedly still sung at the beginning of the present century in the mountains of Georgia, themselves belonged to a tradition predating Rustaveli, or whether they derived from his epic, opinions are divided, but Marjory Wardrop was certainly justified in raising 'the question of the possible formation of the epic from pre-existing material' (*The Man in the Panther Skin* [London, 1912, 1966], p. 158, n. 6, and see p. xii). For even the most "literary" epics do not spring fully armed like Pallas Athene from the head of their authors: those of Dante and Milton had their predecessors in ancient morality plays and the like. The Armenian produced no Homer to transmute their rough diamonds into a perfect gem such as Rustaveli's 'strung pearl' (*margaliti tsqobili*, st. 7), but those interested in epic origins are fortunate to possess the rich Armenian folk heritage. Who knows, had there been an Armenian Homer, whether the tales in the form we now have them might not, for want of interest, have been allowed to die without record?

*Pa proklinje careva fermana:
 "Bog ubijo careva fermana,
 Sto ni care ferman opremijo!"
 Pa mi trazi Alibega mlada.
 Trazi bega care u Stambolu.*

Then she cursed the imperial firman:
 "God destroy the imperial firman,
 Which the sultan sent to us!"
 He sought my young Alibey.
 The sultan in Stambol sought the bey.
 (Lord, *op. cit.*, p. 59)

As in the case of the Homeric epic, versification is made easier by the use of set formulae of a fixed number of syllables that can serve as a whole verse or part of it. For example, the verse *Jalah rece zasede dogata* 'By Allah,' he said, (and) mounted the white horse" (Lord, p. 48) consists of two frequent formulae, the first consisting of a convenient four syllables, the second of six syllables, producing between them the required dekasyllabic verse.

How then, if we are dealing with something other than prose, are we to explain the main body of the Armenian epic tales, the lines of which display such syllabic irregularity? Is it just a matter of a loose "free rhythm" such as Beliaev noted with respect to Turkmen declamations: "One of the characteristics... is a free rhythmic treatment of lines, with copious introductions of emotional exclamations such as *ax!*, *au!*, *yar*, *aman aman!*" (*op. cit.*, p. 144)? This does not sound like the Armenian epic, in which such exclamations are rare. If we are dealing with a prose-like recitative, what determined the length of a line? It might be simply the amount of breath contained at one time in the reciter's lungs. In Serbo-Croat epic tales, according to Lord, though syllabically very regular, "the end of a line is marked by a pause for breath" (*op. cit.*, p. 54). Most lines in the Armenian epic vary between seven and ten syllables, the longer and shorter ones being the exception. The Armenian epic has this in common with the Serbo-Croat epics, that one line contains one thought, the enjambments of Homeric verse, a technique much prized by Milton ('the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another,' *cit. Parry, op. cit.*, p. 250), being practically non-existent:

“very rarely does a thought hang in the air incomplete at the end of a line” (Lord, *op. cit.*, p. 54). Such a technique, calling for no complicated thought processes or syntactical complexities, is well adapted to, indeed probably originates in, the simple village dialects of the reciters. Is then the Armenian bard merely content to pare down his account of any eventually complicated action into a succession of simple statements, so that each will fit into something between seven and ten syllables, and basta? It is not quite as simple as that. There are parallels.

The style of the Russian *byliny* is remarkably close to that of the Armenian epic. Take, for example, these lines from the tale of Il’ja Muromec and Kalin-Tsar’.¹⁵

*Kak Vladimir-knjaz’ da stol’no-kievskij
Porozgnevalsja na starogo kazaka Il’ju Muromca,
Zasadil ego vo pogreb, vo xolodnyj,
Da na tri-to godu pory-vremeni.*

*A u slavogo u knjazja u Vladimira
Byla doc’ da odinokaja.
Ona vidit: èto delo est’nemaloe,
Acto posadil Vladimir-knjaz’ da stol’no kieskij
Starogo kazaka Il’ju Muromca
B tot vo pogreb vo xolodnyj;
A on mog by postaojat’ odin za veru, za otecestvo,
Mog by postojat’ odin za cerkvi za sobornyje,
Mog by poberec’ on knjazja da Vladimira,
Mog by poberec’ Opraksu-korolevicnu...*

When Prince Vladimir, he on the throne of Kiev,
Became angry with the Cossack Ilya of Murom,
He put him in a pit, a deep one,
In a deep pit, in a cold one,
For the space of some three years of time.
Now the famous Prince Vladimir
Had a daughter, an only daughter.
She saw, the matter was no little one,
But that Prince Vladimir, he on the throne of Kiev,
Had put the old Cossack Ilya of Murom

¹⁵ *Onezskie byliny*, transcribed by A. F. Gil’ferding, no. 75, reprinted in *Byliny*, B. Bogomolov, ed. (Leningrad, 1950), p. 90.

Into that pit (so) cold;
 And he alone could stand up for the faith, for the
 fatherland,
 He alone could stand up for the church, for the
 cathedrals,
 He (alone) could protect the Prince, Vladimir,
 Could protect Queen Opraksa....

Of these fifteen verses, two have nine syllables, two have ten, two have eleven, one has twelve, four thirteen, two fifteen, one seventeen, and one eighteen. This is an average of twelve—six syllables per verse, thirteen being the favorite. The Homeric hexameter can vary theoretically between twelve syllables (six spondees, though this never occurs in fact) and eighteen (six dactyls). But this is governed by a strict metrical convention. If one read the Russian verses as though they were arranged as in Germanic poetry, counting the stressed syllables per verse, the result is still irregular. The stresses in the first seven verses would probably be 4, 5, 4, 3, 4, 3, 3.

The *byliny* were certainly mainly sung. An interesting note to the tale of Il'ja Muromec and Solovej the Robber¹⁶ states that after singing 156 verses (all but twenty-two of which begin with the conjunction *A*, and twelve of the same twenty-two begin with *Da'* and) 'from this point (the reciter) only spoke, gave up singing, could not (sing any more), clearly tired.'

In 1877 Rimski-Korsakov published a collection of *100 Russian Folksongs* (Opus 24, reprinted Moscow-Leningrad, 1951) comprising 'tunes written down from persons who heard them long ago' (*zapysivat' napevy ot lic, slyszsich ix v davnje gody*), including six *byliny* (nos. 1-6).

The text of no. 1 is as follows:

*Kak vo gorode stol'no-kievskom,
 U Vladimira krasna solnyska
 Nacinaetsja kak pocestnyj pir
 Na mnogi khjazi i bojarov'ja,
 Kak na tyi bogatyrja velikie,*

¹⁶ A. M. Astaxova, *Byliny Severa*, no. 1, reprinted in Bogomolov's edition, p. 78.

*Kak na ty poljanicy udalyje,
 Uz kak vse na piru naedalisja,
 Uz kak vse na piru napivalisja,
 Da uz kak vse-to na piru porasxvastalisj.*

In the capital city of Kiev,
 At (the court of) Vladimir, Fair Sun,
 Begins a noble feast
 For many princes and boyars,
 And for great bogatyrs.
 And for valiant female warriors.
 Everyone had already eaten his fill.
 Everyone had already drunk his fill.
 And everyone at the feast began his boasting.

The above nine successive verses comprise 10, 10, 10, 12, 12, 11, 13 syllables respectively. In most verses one could count four main stresses, but verse two has three natural stresses, and verse nine five. As Rimski-Korsakov shows (and even if one's natural skepticism suspects that his transcription may not be scientifically accurate, the demonstration is still instructive), the whole may be fitted into a simple melodic structure in standard 4/4 time, the rhythm being distributed over the following bars:

*Kak vo/ gorode stol'no-/ kievskom, U Vla-/
 -dimira krasna/ solnyska Naci-/
 -naetsja kak po-/ cestnyj pir, Na mno-/
 -gi knjazi i bo-/yarov'ja, Kak na
 tyi bogatyri ve-/ likie, Kak na
 tyi poljanicy u-/ dalyje, Uz kak
 vse na piru nae-/ dalisja, Da uz kak

 vse na piru napi-/ valisja, Da uz kak
 vse-to na piru paras-/ xvastalis'/*

It will be observed that the division into bars does not follow the logical division into verses. The first (metrically and musically unaccented) syllables of each verse form an anacrusis before the first main stress of the verse which forms the first beat of the next bar. Thus metrical and musical logic coincide, as against the grammatical

and semantic unity of the verse. It will also be observed that the bars comprise variously two, three (the first and the last, introductory and final, therefore not typical), five, six, and seven syllables. Were one to consist of four or eight, it would not matter musically: a pair of quavers instead of a crotchet, or a semi-breve in place of two crotchets, would preserve the tune and rhythm.

And here lies the whole solution to the problem of versification in the Armenian epic, for there is one form of measured, metrical, rhythm in which verses of an unequal number of syllables may comfortably fit, and be fitted by a competent performer: that of Music. This elder daughter of the Muses has always played a major role in the epic. Although Homer's verses are wonderfully metrically regular, and thereby alone memorizable, they were, according among others to the most incisive researcher into the background of Greek epic, Milman Parry, originally sung, the versions we now possess being taken down by dictation by the scribes in the way that the South Slav epics he investigated were. "Singer," as Parry (p. 451) points out, is the name that most oral poets give themselves (Gk. *aoidós*, Serb *pjevac*, Finnish *laulaja*). It is simply the musical line in which syllables may be fitted into musical bars that make sense of the apparent irregularity of both Russian and Armenian epic verse. With the skilled use of rests, the spread of one syllable over two or three notes, etc., the singer can accommodate verses that vary between say, eight and fourteen syllables, and on occasions, if need be, extend even these parameters.

So the reason for the discrepant syllable count in the Armenian verses is the same as for that in the following Scottish ones:

A sad tale through the town is gaen,
A sad tale on the morrow:
Ah Mary Hamilton has borne a babe
And slain it in her sorrow.¹⁷

The syllable count in the respective verses is 8, 7, 10, 7. But the irregularity is only apparent. The quatrain is part of a *ballad*, originally a song accompanied by a dance, through French and Latin to Greek *ballizô* 'throw the leg about, dance, jump about,' *ballo*

¹⁷ Cit. H. Gardner, *The New Oxford Book of English Verse* (Oxford, 1972), p. 365.

‘throw.’ The syllables can easily be accommodated in musical bars, for it is the number of *beats* that counts, not the number of syllables. As I have written concerning the *Songs of Goght’n* preserved by Movses Khorenats‘i, “[T]he metre... is one of stress, natural to songs accompanied, as Moses expressly states, by a musical instrument, and hence constructed on the principle of beats to the bar, in which the number of syllables is irrelevant.... The *Songs of Goght’n* are not part of Classical Armenian poetry, influenced by the Syriac of Ephrem, etc., but relate most closely to the Armenian popular epic of *David of Sassoun*, recited, like the Slavonic *byliny* and German epics like the *Nibelungenlied* (NB lied ‘song’) in verses bearing a more or less regular number of ictus or beats. Given the Iranian origin of the *Songs*, it is possible that the meter has been directly influenced by the type of meter used in, e.g., the Manichean Parthian hymns, viz. ‘unrhymed, accentual verse which Henning has shown to be characteristic of early Iranian poetry. (M. Boyce, *The Manichaeaeen Hymn Cycles in Parthian* [London, 1954], p. 45).”¹⁸

If a verse has, say, four beats, it is unlikely that it will contain ninety-six syllables, though any number between eight and twenty could be reckoned with, depending on the number, in musical terms, of hemi-demi-semi-quavers, etc., for in such verse it is the number of beats that is essential, the number of syllables being accidental.¹⁹ Abeghyan (*loc. cit.*, *supra*) was right in surmising that it was the number of stresses per verse that counted, though in imagining these to be the ictus of classical metrical feet he distorts the reality, without being able to demonstrate metrical regularity.

We have seen that epic tales probably had their origin in song. By the time the Armenian epic tales reach us, however, and like the Greek they have had, in the course of the thousand years of existence that Soviet scholars assume, though even half as long a period would suffice, ample time to change, they are in the main no longer sung. Parts, at least, of the Armenian epic were, however, still sung at the end of the nineteenth century. Garegin Srvandztiants‘, the first pioneer in the field, taking down the version of *Sasounts‘i Davit‘* or

¹⁸ C. Dowsett, “Little Satana’s Wedding Breakfast,” *In Memoriam Haïg Berbérian*, Dickran Kouymjian, ed. (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1986), pp. 243-244, n. 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Mheri Dour (Mher's Gate) in 1873, described (*apud* M. Abeghyan, II. 2, p. 3) how Krpo of Taron, in the village of Arnist in the plain of Moush, told him that "His master (*varpet*) had an extensive knowledge of the tale, and that there were many passages in verse throughout its length, which he would sing (*džaynov k'erger*).” It would appear, since *Srvandztiants'* gives no notation, that Krpo himself did not sing them, and that much of the musical tradition was lost by his time.

The *Oghormi* (Lord have mercy) verses invoking a blessing on the heroes of the epic with which most reciters began their performance usually display a high degree of metrical regularity. In the case of that of Mourad Hovsep'yan transcribed by Sargis Haykouni (*apud* Abeghyan, II. 1, p. 235) and entitled *Nakhergank'* (sung prelude) the main ten-syllable verse is maintained by the absences or presence of the syllable *en* 'that' before the name of the character:

<i>Our et'ank' darnank'</i>	(5 syllables, a half verse)
<i>Oghormin ke tank' en Saghnasarin</i>	(10 syllables, 5+5)
<i>Our et'ank', darnank'</i>	
<i>Oghormin ke tank' en Baghdasarin</i>	(10)
<i>Our et'ank', darnank'</i>	
<i>Oghormin ke tank' K'arsoun tsamin</i>	(10; en omitted)
<i>Our et'ank' darnank'</i>	
<i>Oghormin ke tank' Deghdzun Khatounin</i>	(10; en omitted)
<i>Our et'ank', darnank'</i>	
<i>Oghormin ke tank' Dzenov Hovanin</i>	(10; en omitted)
<i>Our et'ank', darnank'</i>	
<i>Oghormin ke tank' Ts'eran Vegoyin</i>	(10; en omitted)
<i>Our et'ank, darnank'</i>	
<i>Oghormin ke tank' en Joj Mherin</i>	(10)
<i>Our et'ank', darnank'</i>	
<i>Oghormin ke tank' Göhar Khatounin</i>	(10; en omitted)
<i>Our et'ank', darnank'</i>	
<i>Oghormin chitank'[chetank'] Mesra Melik'in</i>	(10; en omitted)
<i>Our et'ank', darnank'</i>	
<i>Oghormin ke tank' T'arlan Davt'in</i>	(9, but 10 reading <i>Davet'in</i> , or <i>en T'arlan Davt'in</i>)
<i>Our et'ank', darnank'</i>	
<i>Oghormin ke tank' Khandout Khanemin</i>	(10; en omitted)
<i>Our et'ank', darnank'</i>	

Oghormin ke tank' Pstik Meherin

(10, hurrying over
ps̄tik, pron. more like
leisurely *pestik*)

Wherever we go, let us turn.

We give a Lord have mercy for that Saghnasar
etc.

The closing strophes are less regular:

Orhneal Ter Mer Yisous K'ristos

(8 syllables)

Mer tiroj kamk'e, orhnout'oun-barerarout'oun

(5+8 syllables)

Ver hakanj aroghin elli

(8 syllables)

Ver shen ojakhin elli

(7 syllables)

Blessed (is) our Lord Jesus Christ.

The will of our Lord, blessing and beneficence

Be upon him who gives ear

Be upon the merry hearth.

The convenient length of the names of the heroes (five syllables on four + *en* following the initial five-syllable hemistich *oghormin ke tank'* (in the case of the anti-hero Msra Melik' *chetank'*) reminds one of the division of the Homeric hexameter into two equal hemistichs, the first or second being a common formula, e.g.:

tòn d'aute proseípe (8 times)/ *polytlas dios Odysseus* (24 times).

'There addressed him again/ the much suffering divine Odysseus';²⁰ and the juggling with the syllable *en* as with similar syllables used in Homeric verse when required by the meter. This is the same device used by the Serbo-Croats in their *Jallah rece/ zsede dogata* type of verse referred to above. In the case of the less strict Armenian line, bound by no exact dactylic/spondaic meter or precise syllable count, such formulae, such metric clichés, the function of which is just that of the typographical plate or pellet which gives them their name, are not absolutely essential. Nor are they essential in the case of the Russian *byliny*, in which "Homeric epithets" of the

²⁰ Parry, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

type *Vladimir-khjaz' da stol'no-kievskij* (Prince Vladimir of the Kievan Throne), *Solnysko Vladimir-knjaz'* (Fair) Sun Prince Vladimir, *Saryj kazak da Il'ja Muromec* (The Old Cossack Ilya of Murom), *Sobaka Kalin-car'* (The dog Kalin-Tsar), *Dobrynjuska Nikitic mlad* (The young Dobrynja son of Nikita), *Svjataja Rus'* (Holy Russia), *Kamennaja Moskava* (Stone[-walled] Moscow), *Slavnyj gorod Kiev* (Famous city of Kiev), *Xrabraja Litva* (Brave Lithuania), *Syra Mat'Zemlja* (Damp Mother Earth), nevertheless abound, providing the reciter with a goodly number of ready made phrases with which to fill out his lines. It is the same with Armenian verse. It is not that *t'arlan* (fair, brave) and *t'elaor* (tongue-tied) are justifiable epithets for David, *dzenov* 'loud-voiced' for Hovan, *pestik* 'little' for the younger Mher, *ts'ran* 'slobbering' for Vergo: they serve to bring their bearers metrically in line with *Mesra Melik'* (King of Egypt); one may note that in the *byliny Turec-saltan* (Sultan of the Turks) is considered metrically adequate without any particular epithet), *K'arsoun Chogh Tsam* (Forty Braids), *Gohar Khat'oun* (Lady Jewel) the four syllables of whose respective names will not have been fortuitous.

In another *Oghormin*, in the Van dialect, transcribed anonymously from an unnamed informant in *Azragrakan Handes*, no. XX (1910), reproduced *apud* Abeghyan, II. 1, p. 391, the verse is less, but still fairly, regular. The basic ten-syllable verse is kept up by the constant (5+5) ten-syllable refrain *Orhnyal e Astvats, k'o khenamn e shat* (Blessed is God, thy [loving-] care is great), though no attempt is made from the fifth verse to regularize.

<i>Tänk' oghormin</i>	(4 syllables introduction)
<i>Tänk' oghormin paron Ter Nersesin</i>	(10 syllables)
<i>Orhnyal e Astvats, k'ö khenamn e shat</i>	(10)
<i>Tänk' oghormin Töt' Chogh Tsam Güharin</i>	(10)
<i>Orhnyal, etc.</i>	(10)
<i>Tänk' oghormin Sandoukh Khat'ounin</i>	(9)
<i>Orhnyal etc.</i>	(10)
<i>Tänk' oghormin Sanasarin</i>	(8)
<i>Orhnyal, etc.</i>	(10)
<i>Tänk' oghormin Päghdäsarín</i>	(8)
<i>Orhnyal, etc.</i>	(10)
<i>Tänk' oghormin Khandout' Khat'ünin</i>	(9)

'Let us give a *Lord have mercy*,
 Let us give a *Lord have mercy* for Mr. Ter Nerses (the patron?)
 Blessed is God, the (loving-) care is great.
 Let us give a *Lord have mercy* for Gohar of the Seven Braids,'

etc.

And so on, no verse being less than eight or more than ten syllables in length.

The various forms of the *Oghormi* have been notated on several occasion. Two verses only are given by Khalat'eants' from Zatik Khapoyents''s version:

Darnam zoghormin te tam Melk'set' k'ahanin,
Darnam zoghormin te tam tay Sanasarin.

'Let me turn, I shall give a *Lord have mercy*,
 for Melk'set' the priest.
 Let me turn, I shall give a *Lord have mercy*,
 let it be given to Sanasar'

The verses consist of twelve syllables (7+5), the second verse being regularized by the addition of the syllable *tay* (may it be given) before *Sanasarin*, which consists of only four syllables as compared with the five of *Melk'set' k'ahanin*. The tune and the rhythm is notated by Khalat'eants' (p. viii).

Musical Notation and Verse

Since one is concerned in this paper with versification and meter, only the rhythm is relevant here, not the actual tune. The rhythm of the above, noting the crotchets as long with macra, and the quavers short with breves, can be transcribed as follows:

Da-ar-/ -na-yam/ zo-ghor-/ -min te-/ -ye tam/
Melk'-set' k'a-/ -ha-nin

Thus, the twelve syllables of the verse have become fifteen notes over seven bars of varying double and triple time. Liberties are taken with the normal accentuation of spoken Armenian, in that the (in prose) unstressed initial syllables *dar-*, *zo-*, and *Mel-* bear the first

beat of a bar. The first four bars suggest a poetic meter like that of the Arabic and Persian *hazadj* verse, ---/ ---, and it is tempting to read them as two bars of 7/8 time, which (with a reversed 4+3 rhythm) would fit the fifth and sixth bars.

Komitas (*apud* Abeghyan, II.1, fac. p. 208) in fact distributed the same text and notes (also fifteen in number) with three bars, two of 7/8 time, the middle one of 11/8, with the following rhythm:

Da-ar-na-yam/ zo-ghor-min te- ye-tam/ Melk'set' k'a-ha-nin

Sp. Melik'yan (*supra*) gives a different melody for basically the same verse, (with the variant name *Abamelik'in*, of the same syllable count as *Melk'set' k'ahanin*) as far as the introductory *darnam zoghormin te tam* is concerned, though the names of the heroes have the same tune. The verse here, however, is given a 6/8 time signature:

music over words

Dar-na-a-yam zo-ghor-/ -min te tam/ A-ba-me-li-/ -k'in

This structure, however, seems artificial, though rhythmically consonant with modern European taste. For his verse of nineteen syllables, A. K'och'aryan (*ibid.*) gives a fairly free rhythm version (*ardzak asoyt'ov*) on the other hand, which suggests the muezzin's call. His time signature 2-3-2/8 for the last three bars could be construed as 7/8 (I omit the accidentals):

music over words

*Dar-nam zo-ghor- -min/ te tam zo-ghor- -min/
Ce- -nov O-ha- nin/ gö O-ha-nin*

This latter version appears to have been influenced by Muslim styles, but must be a genuine transcription. There was plenty of time for Armenian music to undergo such influence in the course of the past nine hundred years of Turkish and Persian rule over most of Armenia, though native traditions survived side by side.

It cannot be irrelevant that a practically identical situation obtains in the epic tradition of a people closer to Armenia than

Russia, namely the Nart cycle of the Ossetes, which may indeed have had a direct influence on the Armenian, or derive from older Iranian models which had an influence on the Ossetic, the Armenian, and possibly the Russian also. The versification of the *kadaeg* (from *kad* 'glory, praise') is of the same nature as that of the Armenian epic, the verses being described by V. I. Abaev and I. V. Dzanaev as consisting of from nine to thirteen syllables, though, unlike the Armenian, with an obligatory caesura after the fifth or sixth syllable, each hemistich having usually one main stress at the beginning. The verses are normally unrhymed, but are always sung to the accompaniment of the *qisën-faendër*, a two stringed bowed lute cognate with the *bambirn* that Movses Khorenats'i says accompanied the *Songs of Goght'n*, or the *duuadaestanon*, a twelve-stringed harp.²¹ K. G. Cxurbaeva's article,²² is the best on the subject. Many researchers of the poetic texts of the Ossetic Nart tales have remarked that they, with very few exceptions, take the form of prose narratives. This in part results from the fact, in the words of V. I. Abaev, that "the majority of transcribers do not request the narrator to sing, but to relate, so that one can, if necessary, stop the narrator, question him, and ask him to repeat what he has said, which would not be possible if he were singing."²³ Only in conjunction with the tune does the internal rhythmic beat of the meter come to life. The tunes form an indispensable and important element, restraining the improvisation of a "prose" text and giving it /the verse/ a distinct compositional form in every case (pp. 482-483). Cxurbaeva gives the text and notated melody of three Nart tunes (pp. 477-479) on the basis of tapes contained in the Cabinet for Folk Music of the Moscow conservatory in the name of P. I. Tchaikovski. Her own transcriptions are all in 2/4 time, that by B. A. Galaev, in a mixture of 7/4, 4/4, 11/8, 3/2, 7+7/8, 7+2/8, 9+11/8, showing, it would seem, great ingenuity in establishing a rhythm at all. In the Ossetic verse

²¹ K. E. Gagkaev, "O jazyke i stile osetinskix nartskix skazaniij," *apud* A. A. Petrosian, ed., *Skazanija o Nartax* (Moscow, 1969), p. 426; good illustrations of the musical instruments are to be found *ibid.*, pp. 365 and 377.

²² "Onapevax osetinskix nartovskix skazaniij" (On the tunes of the Ossetic Nart tales), *apud* Petrosian, pp. 469-483.

²³ Abaev, "Nartskij èpos," *Izv. Severo-Osetinskogo Naucni-Issledovatel'skogo Instituta*, t. X, fasc. 1 (Dzauzikau, 1945), p. 114.

quoted, as in the case of the Armenian, an irregular number of syllables is subordinated to a regular number of bars, four to a verse, and Cxurbaeva has drawn up a table (p. 482) demonstrating the many variations. What she has to say concerning the performance of the Nart tales is possibly of relevance to ancient performances of the Armenian epic, according to a tradition now apparently lost: "The tunes of the Ossetic Nart tales still preserved represent vivid examples of the most ancient strata of popular musical culture. To testify the laconic nature of their execution, the narrowness of the tonal parameters of the melodies, the variation of the internal phrase rhythm intimately linked to the improvisation of the poetic text. Popular performances of a narrative character, to which above all the Nart epic belongs, are executed by the reciter each time anew, with well-known variations (*s izvestnymi izmenenijami*) of the poetic text. Over and above this, the manifest irregularity of the unrhymed verses has a direct influence on the variable internal-phrase (internal-beat, in the case of music) rhythm. Each reciter has one or more (usually not more than two or three) tunes, to which he sings the various tales, independently of their content, whether he performs one and the same tale now in one tune, now in another, or a whole series of tales in one and the same tune... (One and the same tale as sung by various singers is far from having the same tune)." (p. 475, and nn. 12, 13). Those who research the Nart epics can congratulate themselves on the fact that Abaev and Cxurbaeva fully appreciated the difference between Wumumba and Kana.

One may visualize four stages in the evolution of the Armenian epic, examples of all of which may be found in extant versions:

a) Ancient heroic songs sung to a musical accompaniment, with meters and rhythms strongly influenced by the stressed meters of Iran (e.g. the *Songs of Goght'n*, the *Elegy on Prince Juansher*).

b) Songs in roughly syllabically equal verse, the stressed rhythm of which was controlled by the melody, probably of a simple recitative type (e.g. the *Oghormi* introductions).

c) Declaimed versions in which more strictly syllabically equal verses in monorhyme, more typical of the medieval *ashoughs* or "troubadors," were incorporated (e.g. the *Eulogy to the Prince of Khandout*).

d) Late versions in which the music and meter have been lost apart from an occasional few snatches, and which are told in the style of a folktale.

The intermingling of these versions in observed practice shows that the above divisions were never watertight. Epic styles would have changed over the centuries organically under the internal influence of outstanding native performers, and from the outside under the influence of foreign styles: Iranian, Greek, Syriac, or Turkish. Some influence, though perhaps superficial, from the Muslim milieu in which the reciters lived, is manifest in the names of many personages, e.g. Armaghan (“Gift”), Ismil Khatoun, Bat‘mana Bugha (“Infamous-for NP *badnam*- Bull”), Ch‘arbakhar K‘ami (“Four-fever Wind”?), Kholbashi (“Slave chief” or “Column Commander”), while even the heroes’ famous steed has an Arabo-Persian-Turkish name, Jalali (Majestic). The erosion of traditional village society in the last two centuries by which the peasants and their bards sank rapidly in general esteem has resulted in the present-day situation in which the epic has virtually died out, to be conserved, like medical specimens from donors long deceased, in the Wumumbu of well-intentioned scholarly transcriptions. David of Sassoun has joined Hector in the Valhalla of oldie heroes, for whom the urban proletariat and their pop-singers of today have neither time nor sympathy. Some still keep their memory, however, as the Fresno/Los Angeles version, transcribed in 1971 from an elderly woman of the Van area, and included in this volume of the essays, shows. It is not only rare in being, as Professor Kouymjian describes it, the only fragment of the epic record in the Diaspora (which historic event by itself destroyed much of the epic tradition), the only example taken down in America or Europe, but in being performed by a woman. One remembers that Mnemsyne, the mother of the Muses and goddess of memory, was thought of as a woman. *Tānk‘ oghormin* (Tikin Sanamin). One of my Armenian students caused my pulse-rate to rise by saying that her father, now resident in Paris but originating from an Armenian enclave in Azerbaidjan, could recite the epic, but it transpired he had learned Hovhannes T‘oumanian’s twentieth century version by heart. Nevertheless, it shows that the epic spirit still persists somewhere, and the optimist might hope that it will one day undergo another renaissance, though Professor Kouymjian has in his *Introduction* to this volume adduced cogent

chronological reasons for pessimism. It would be a pleasure to be able to counter Marcuse's charge that "it is in the nature of the academic mind to concern itself only with what is dead."²⁴ That is what Wittek's *griot* was worried about. We must make sure we do not kill our specimens. A butterfly in a case with a pin through its back will not explain the principal mystery of the butterfly: how it ever gets off the ground.

²⁴ *Sigmund Freud* (Hamburg, 1956), p. 46.

№1. КАК ВО ГОРОДЕ СТОЛЬНО-КИЕВСКОМ

Maestoso quasi recitativo

Как во го-ро-де сто-ль-но-ки-ев-ском, у Вла-
 -ды-ми-ра, Кра-са сол-ныш-на вь-че-на-ст-ли как во-
 че-ст-ный нар, на мно-го ки-ев и бо-и-ро-в-я, как на-
 ты - и бо-га-ты-ри ве-ли-ки-е, как на-ты и-по-ла-ни-цы у-
 -да-ли-а. Уж как все на пи-ру на-е-да-ли-ся, да уж как
 все на пиру на-ли-ся, да уж как все-то на пиру по-рас-хвас-та-ли-ся.

A transcription of the melody of the Russian *bylina* beginning *Kak vo gorode stol'no-kievskom*, in the capital city of Kiev, by Rimski-Korsakov, op. 24, no. 1, in *Sto russkix narodnyx pesen* (100 Russian Folksongs) (St. Petersburg, 1877, repr. Moscow-Leningrad, 1951), pp. 7-8.

ՆՄՈՒՇՆԵՐ ՀՍԱՍՆԱ ՄՈՒՐԻ, ԺՈՂ. ՎԵՊԻ ՅԵՐԳՎՈՂ ՀԱՏՎԱՆԵՐԻՑ

ԶՈՂՈՐՄԻՆ

Maestoso. Հայնադրեց՝ ԿՈՄԻՏԱՅ՝

Դա-առ-նա-յա՛մ զո-գո՛ր-մին ալ-լը-ա՛մ Մե-լը-սե-թը-նա-նին

Դա-առ-նա-յա՛մ զո-գո՛ր-մին ալ-լը-ա՛մ առ-Մա-նա-առ-բին

Maestoso. Հայնադրեց՝ ՍՊ. ՄԵԼԻԿՅԱՆ

Դառ-նամ զո-գո՛ր մին ալ-լը-ա՛մ Ա-լա-նե-լի-բին

Դառ-նամ՝ զո-գո՛ր մին ալ-լը-ա՛մ Սա-նա-առ-բին

Առաջի աստիքով Հայնադրեց՝ Ա. ԳՈՐԱՐՅԱՆ

Տառ-նամ զո-գո՛ր - մին

ալ-լը-ա՛մ զո-գո՛ր - մին Մե-նա-նի-ն

զո-նա-նին

~~~~~ = Կրկնվող վերադարձ  
 ♯ ♯ = Բացախաձուլումներ  
 ~~~~~ = Անշարժ ձուլված (Ա. Գ.)

Three melodies for the *Zoghormin* introduction transcribed by Komitas, Sp. Melik'yan and A. K'och'aryan respectively, *apud Sasna tsrer*, ed. M. Abeghyan, vol. II, part 1 (Erevan, 1951), facing p. 208.

СКАЗАНИЕ О НАРТЕ УРЫЗМАГЕ
исп. Л. Мамиев Зап. К. Цхурбаевой

Голос

Хъисын
фандыр.

$\text{♩} = 72$

1) Нар- ты а- дое-мыл фыц аз ныхъе-ны, мæ кургæ, ныхъе- ны. М...

2) æ- мæ сæ фæ-си-вæд зæгъы, ныхъасыстæу ныхъаргæсты уæ-уæу уæ...

3) Сыр-ло- ны га-дза, зæгъ, сæ сæр-ты ма мын ра-хиз-ба- хиз кутыкæдæм...

4) Гæ-мæй-на-в- тæмæй зæгъы, ни-цуал фæ-ра- зы, фæ-ра- зы уæ-уæу уæ...

5) Са-га-на ду- ар-мæ суг-тæм ра-у-а-ди, фæсгæмæкæугæ-наæ куты фæдæжт.

The Legend of Nart Urëzmag, sung by L. Mamiev with fandër accompaniment, transcribed by K. Cxurbæve, *apud* A. A. Petrosyan, ed., *Skazanija o Nartax* (Moscow, 1969), p. 477.